THEY'VE GOT WHAT IT TAKES

Good food and employees with the right stuff make Bishop Buffets and Furr's popular cafeterias

Bishop Buffets and Furr's Cafeterias, both wholly owned subsidiaries of the K mart Corporation, are growing eateries that are bringing back hoards of satisfied customers. Why? Because of their good, home-style food served at reasonable prices in a cozy atmosphere with friendly employees.

Like similar operations, these cafeterias started out small. But since coming under the protective wing of K mart, they now see that the avenues for quicker growth and success are widening.

Furr's, based in Lubbock, Texas, is the second largest cafeteria chain in the country, operating 122 cafeterias and two pie shops in 12 states in the southwest. They expanded from 33 cafeterias in 1970 to 76 in 1980. Since Furr's was purchased by K mart in 1980, it is now geared to open 20 to 30 cafeterias each year.

Furr's was an offshoot many years ago of a supermarket chain that began early in the century in West Texas. With the backing of the Roy Furr family, Cliff Andrews, a former army mess sergeant, developed his methods and ideas about food service to great success. In 1947, Andrews began as a baker at a small cafeteria attached to a Furr's supermarket in downtown Odessa, Texas. He later managed that cafeteria and supervised others as they were built. The cafeteria operations developed so well that the companies divided in 1959. Don Furr, oldest son of Roy, became president of Furr's Cafeterias with Cliff Andrews as vice president. Andrews became president in 1975 when Furr became chief executive officer. Today, the Furr family no longer owns the supermarket chain.

Bishop Buffets, based in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, opened their first cafeteria in Waterloo, Iowa, over 60 years ago and was purchased in 1983 by K mart. Currently, there are 31 cafeterias in operation.

Bishop people are big on service. They carry trays, welcome children and parents with a special children's hostess and offer additional coffee and iced tea at no extra charge. There is a no tipping house policy that prevails in all Bishop cafeterias.

Don Fritz, who became vice chairman of the board and senior executive officer for Furr's when it was purchased, was asked if he would work with the Bishop Buffets organization while still remaining involved with Furr's. Fritz agreed and was made vice chairman of Bishop Buffets in 1983.

"The new growth and expansion (of Bishop) will be done totally through utilizing the same people and methods that have made this firm so successful to date," Fritz explains. "We see no reason to make vast changes from what has already been proven successful. K mart is quick to recognize talent and found Bishop to have the folks with the know-how, plus the expertise to make the expansion plan come together. It is K mart's plan to increase Bishop Buffets into becoming the most dominate food service operator within our marketing area."

If you happen to spot a Bishop or Furr's Cafeteria and decide to give them a try, what can you expect to find? Aside from efficient service, cleanliness, and helpful employees you'll find lots of good food.

At Bishop's the menu changes daily, but there are some basics like fried chicken, roast round of beef, baked ham, fish and salads. And try as you may, you'll find it nearly impossible to pass up their famous Royal Ambrosia Chocolate Pie, made from their own secret recipe.

Prices are set according to the market prices of various area restaurants, but basically you can build your menu to suit your pocket. If you have $2.50 in your wallet, there is no reason why you can't go through the line and get a good, filling meal.

Furr's offers over 1,200 items, from Hawaiian style beef tips or meatloaf with hot Creloe sauce to their famous Millionaire Pie. Like Bishop's, their prices too are reasonable. And at both cafeterias, everything is served on china crockery, with glassware and stainless cutlery.

Inside and out, Furr's Cafeterias are pleasant and homey, inviting customers to relax and enjoy their meals.